**Leek and Butterbean Soup**

Serves 4

Rich, thick and warming, this soup has a lovely, velvety texture. Perfect for chilly winter days, it’s inexpensive, quick to make and perfect either for a light supper or filling lunch at work or school.

400g leeks, trimmed and sliced

1 small onion, peeled and sliced

2 cloves garlic, sliced

2 x 400g tin butterbeans, drained

4 sprigs of thyme, leaves only

1 bay leaf

70ml extra virgin olive oil

1.1L chicken / vegetable stock

Heat a little butter or oil in a large sauce pan and add the sliced onions and leeks. Cook gently for 10 minutes until softened, covered with a lid. Don’t allow the leeks to stick to the bottom of the pan and burn as they will become bitter. After 10 minutes, add the garlic, thyme, bay leaf and a little salt and pepper and continue to cook in the same way for a further 10 minutes.

Drain the butterbeans, rinse, and tip into the pan with the leeks. Cook for 2 more minutes, still covered with a lid and then pour over the stock. Bring to the boil and simmer gently for 10 minutes.

Using a jug blender if possible, but alternatively a hand held stick blender, blend until very smooth and velvety in consistency, adding the extra virgin olive oil as you blend.

Tip back into a clean pan and taste to check the seasoning, adding more salt and pepper as needed and perhaps a squeeze of lemon juice. Return to the heat and when piping hot, serve. Top with a drizzle of olive oil, cream or perhaps a crumbling of goat’s cheese or croutons.